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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD PLAYS ELECTION BOYCOTT
CARD AS RHETORICAL CLASHES CONTINUE

REF: A. AMMAN 3395 NOTAL

- [1](#)B. AMMAN 3311
- [1](#)C. AMMAN 3289 NOTAL
- [1](#)D. AMMAN 3240
- [1](#)E. AMMAN 3005
- [1](#)F. AMMAN 2985
- [1](#)G. AMMAN 2668
- [1](#)H. AMMAN 1936

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) The rhetorical clash between the GOJ and Islamists continues, with the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), milking accusations of government fraud in the July 31 municipal elections to position itself for fall parliamentary elections. The IAF is calling for a new government, a change in the election law, and guarantees that the parliamentary elections will be free and fair. The Front continues to threaten a boycott, seeking to generate support among Jordanians who resent perceived government interference in the municipal elections. The Government, for its part, is pushing back: seeking to calm the situation by denying the existence of a crisis between itself and the IAF; asserting that there will be no change to election laws; and maintaining its own media counteroffensive to portray the IAF as disloyal to the state. End summary.

Islamists Continue to Cry Foul

[1](#)2. (SBU) In the aftermath of contentious municipal elections on July 31, the Islamic Action Front is contesting the results, calling for a re-vote in several municipalities, and is reported to have sent King Abdullah a letter outlining voting irregularities. (These irregularities are cited as the reason the IAF withdrew from the municipal election on election-day (ref D).)

[1](#)3. (C) The IAF seeks to rally public support behind its calls for the King to annul the municipal election results and for an independent investigation of the fraud charges. The GOJ, for its part, has publicly called for the IAF to bring its charges to court; no such legal process has been initiated thus far. (Note: While emboffs have heard of second-hand allegations of improprieties during the vote on election-day, hard evidence or credible first-hand accounts of vote-rigging or other malfeasance have yet to surface. End note.)

Islamists Welcome Parliamentary Elections,
But Will They Play Ball?

¶4. (SBU) In a necessary constitutional step prior to parliamentary elections, the King dissolved the legislature on August 19. On August 21, the GOJ announced that the elections would be held on November 20.

¶5. (C) The MB has responded by maintaining its confrontational tone, deploying its tried-and-true tactic of threatening a boycott and at a minimum postponing any decision on participation (refs B, D, and F). To this end, IAF and MB representatives have kept up a steady stream of media appearances to make their case to the broadest possible audience. Controller General of the MB in Jordan, Salim Al-Falahat, conditionally welcomed the dissolution of parliament, calling it a "step in the right direction." Other MB and IAF figures have echoed Falahat's statement while suggesting that the ball is in the GOJ's court to ensure IAF participation. IAF MP Zuhair Abu Raghed, for example, on August 21 warned, "we still feel the repercussions of the municipal polls," and said that the IAF was examining whether to participate in the elections or not.

On August 22, the IAF's Deputy Secretary General Irhayel Al-Gharaibeh told news outlets that the IAF would decide at the end of August whether to take part in or boycott the parliamentary elections. COMMENT: Embassy expects that the IAF will delay a decision as long as possible - certainly into the Fall - to capitalize on the "will they or won't they" speculation, and to maximize the pressure on the government to make concessions in order to ensure a more representative parliament - or at least one more favorable to the IAF's expectation that it should gain seats. End comment.

What does the IAF Want?

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¶6. (SBU) IAF leaders have called on the government to take steps to ensure free and fair parliamentary elections, to include dissolution of the current government. The President of the MB's Shura Council, Hamza Mansour, told reporters that the IAF was awaiting the government's response to a list of "guarantees" sought by the IAF. He called on the government to draft a temporary elections law in order to ensure what he termed a "fair" election that would eliminate the one-person, one-vote system, which the IAF argues diminishes its electoral powers. Falahat similarly said "citizens must be reassured that the coming elections will be fair." He called for guarantees for free and fair elections, and echoed the call for a change in the election law to change the one-person, one-vote system. (Note: As reported previously, the IAF prefers a system whereby a voter can vote for multiple candidates from their district, which, in the MB's view, means more IAF candidates winning seats (ref F). End note.)

¶7. (SBU) Zaki Bani-Irsheid, the IAF Secretary General, has tried to paint these IAF calls as moves to protect the interests of all Jordanians. He was quoted by Al-Jazeera on August 20 as saying that "the required guarantees are not for the Islamic movement only, but for all national forces." He continued, "We should make citizens feel that their votes have value and impact on political life."

¶8. (SBU) Falahat, in a wide-ranging August 22 interview on Al-Jazeera, said that the IAF would "not abandon the parliamentary elections" unless the powers-that-be prohibit the Islamic movement from taking part. He stressed the MB's call to replace the current government, with the aim of having a new government run the elections. Falahat said that the current GOJ "cannot win the people's trust," declaring that its "failure" in conducting the municipal election suggests that it should not implement the parliamentary election.

Government Pushing Back

¶9. (SBU) The GOJ has pushed back. It is seeking to minimize the significance of the IAF's complaints, by repeatedly denying that there is any crisis between the government and the Front, while sticking to its guns on the management of the upcoming elections. In laying down the latest GOJ marker, spokesman Nasser Joudah on August 27 dismissed calls for changing the voting formula, saying the elections will proceed with the established one-person, one-vote system.

¶10. (S) Contacts have argued to poloffs that the government may have overplayed its hand (in influencing the municipal election) on purpose, with the goal of inflicting on the IAF a devastating defeat in the July 31 election. The purpose of such a government move, according to contacts, would be to force the IAF to boycott parliamentary elections, giving the government and pro-government political forces the space to dominate the new parliament with no interference from the Islamic movement. (Note: Jordan's leadership has told the Ambassador they do not seek an MB boycott of parliamentary elections, but are aiming at reducing their presence in parliament by supporting and unifying the MB's secular foes (refs A and C). End Note.)

¶11. (SBU) The government has also kept up its own media campaign, with pro-government journalists taking the IAF to task for failing to show sufficient humility (e.g. portraying itself as the sole protector of the Jordanian people) and for showing disloyalty to state institutions by publicly attacking the government. The IAF, naturally, pushes back by asserting its loyalty to the Hashemite monarchy and the nation while defending its prerogative to criticize the government and cabinet. Falahat, for example, has assailed what he called the government's "mobilization against the Islamic Movement." He emphasized that the Islamic Movement would not try to "overpower the homeland" because the MB is an integral part of the Jordanian nation. He further argued that the MB movement in Jordan is "moderate," which is why he says it is being attacked by the United States and the "Zionist enemy" (ref H).

Playing the U.S./Israel Card as Well

¶12. (SBU) To strengthen its rhetoric, the IAF continues to play its other time-tested card: criticizing U.S. policy and Israeli actions. In a recent interview Falahat made a point of hailing Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation (saying that the MB in Jordan supported "Hamass and all

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Palestinian resistance movements in Palestine"), while rejecting accusations that Jordan's MB was too supportive of Hamas - and that that support has cost the IAF support among Jordanians. He recently said that the MB's "love for Hamas was not blind," and that Jordan's MB did not blindly support everything that Hamas says. He said that the MB would criticize Hamas when it errs and has done so. He asserted that the IAF stands by all Palestinian resistance, and "does not support one group against another."

¶13. (C) COMMENT: These efforts by various IAF leaders in multiple media venues appear to be a concerted effort to boost MB support in Jordan following MB blunders regarding Hamas' Gaza takeover (refs E and G). The MB is trying to regain lost political support by claiming to be defending the interests of all Jordanians and portraying itself as an underdog standing up to the powerful and corrupt government.

Who is Winning the Propaganda Showdown?

¶14. (C) As the Islamist - government struggle continues to play out, contacts have offered emboffs varying views

regarding which side has the upper hand leading into the November parliamentary election. Emboffs heard one view from a newly-elected Christian municipal council member from Madaba who asserted that the government is correct to go after the IAF, whose losses at the polls were real, not the result of election fraud. Furthermore, he supported the government position on the IAF, arguing that if he had a choice between democracy where the IAF would win, and no democracy, he would rather not have democracy - he emphatically added that most Jordanians would agree with him, regardless of religion.

¶15. (C) The conventional wisdom and majority view among our contacts, nonetheless, is that the IAF is gaining support by portraying itself as David to the government's Goliath. By claiming government responsibility for election-day interference, while pillorying the GOJ for its pro-U.S. policies and its relations with Israel, some contacts suggest that the IAF has successfully gained sympathy on the Jordanian street. In this view, apparently widespread public belief in government vote-rigging for the sake of anti-IAF candidates has increased support for the Front. These contacts have criticized what they call the government's ham-handed approach in trying to lessen MB influence. The same contacts warn that such an approach is dangerous because it pushes the MB into a corner and might cause the Islamists to lash out, upsetting the decades-old compact whereby the GOJ gives the MB political space as long as the movement does not question the fundamental basics of the regime and Hashemite rule in Jordan.

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